

David Dexter House (Dexter-Fitchburg House)
Claremont
Sullivan County
New Hampshire

HABS No. NH-195

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

DAVID DEXTER HOUSE
(Oexter-Fitchburg House)

HABS No. NH-195

- Location: Claremont, Sullivan County, New Hampshire. The house was originally located at the foot of a hill and its street address was Oexter Heights. It was moved a few hundred feet from its original location to a hilltop in 1975 as a mitigative alternative to demolition.
- Present Use: The house was rehabilitated in 1979 by its owner for multi-family residential use.
- Significance: Architecturally, the house with both its notable exterior and interior late Georgian-Federal detailing is one of the last remaining and highest quality Federal frame houses in Claremont. Historically, Stephen and David Dexter's highly successful manufacturing business venture helped to create a later development of large-scale manufacturing industry in Claremont.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Circa 1790-1800.
2. Alterations and additions: Asphalt siding was installed in both the main block and the rear addition in the 20th century. It was completely removed during the recent rehabilitation of the house, revealing the original narrow clapboards of the main block. The rear addition was demolished during the house's 1975 move to a new location. Bathrooms have been installed in the second floor of the main block.

B. Historical Context:

Stephen and David Dexter were highly successful businessmen who are credited with the establishment of large-scale manufacturing industry in Claremont, which began in the first quarter of 19th century. In 1790 the Dexters bought two parcels of land, of which one contained dams and mills already existing (these were apparently for milling lumber). In or about 1800 the Oexters constructed a dam, grist, saw and oil mills and a scythe shop across from the Sugar River. Their businesses became highly successful and soon other businessmen followed Dexters' example and undertook similar ventures. Following the Oexters' deaths the manufacturing industry in Claremont continued to expand and eventually dominated the town. Many new industrial buildings were built during the growth period. The site of the Dexters' original mills later became the property of the Monadnock Mills, the largest of the mills in Claremont.

David Dexter's house, apparently built during the operation of his manufacturing business, was located at the foot of Dexter Hill, near where his mills stood. Following his death his house was used as mill workers' boarding house known as the Fitchburg House.

In addition to being a successful businessman, David Dexter was a prominent townsman in Claremont, being active in both local and regional politics and financial affairs. He served as a selectman of Claremont for 13 years; a chairman of Board of Selectmen for 8 years; a representative to New Hampshire Legislature for 6 years; and director of the Claremont Bank. During Dexter's early years he was a blacksmith in Worcester, Massachusetts and a Revolutionary War captain in Colonel Lippitt's regiment.

Before coming to Claremont, Stephen Dexter worked as a blacksmith in Newport, New Hampshire.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Description of Exterior:

The frame house is a 2-1/2 story rectangle measuring 45'-3-3/4" x 36'-6-3/4". The front elevation is five bays wide and both end elevations are four bays wide.

The main entrance is a good example of Federal style. It consists of a full entablature with considerable use of moldings, bands, dentils, triglyphs and other kinds of trim; flanking sunken paneled pilasters carry the entablature. Its door is wide and paneled and above it is a transom light. A similar but less elaborate entrance exists on the east elevation.

On the front and end elevations all windows are symmetrically arranged. The rear elevation has an irregular window plan. On the front (south) elevation the first story has two windows on either side of the main entrance, and the second story has five windows. Both end elevations (east and west) have four windows on first and second stories and three windows on the attic story. All first story windows have flat-head lintels which are similar to the flat cornice of the main entrance entablature. Most of the windows are probably original and are of the common double-hung sash type with 12-over-12 panes.

The roof of the main block is gabled with two dormers on the front slope and three dormers on the rear slope. Below the roof is a notable denticulated cornice, probably original. The roof of the rear addition was also gabled.

B. Description of Interior:

The house has a central-hall floor plan with rooms on either side of the hall. The parlour is located in the front west side and the dining room is located in the front east side.

The most notable interior feature of the house is the parlour, whose original decorative elements are still intact. A particularly ornate Federal mantelpiece highlights this room. The upper part of the mantel consists of swag and urn motifs, and the lower part consists of leaf motif. Moldings and dentils add finishing touches to the mantel. Marble is used for the fireplace opening. The door and window surrounds, door panels and baseboards are decorated with reeded trim. The cornice consists of modillions, a band of reeding and incised lines resembling a triglyph motif. Beneath the parlour windows are panels with reeded trim.

A number of paneled doors in the lower and upper floors have "H-L" hinges. The original main door and the door leading to the kitchen have hand-wrought heart-shaped hinges. The kitchen has a large fireplace, which was common during its heyday, and a cupboard with a paneled door. The open-string stairway in the first floor hall has its sides embellished with moldings, reeded trim and a beaded molding. The balusters, two to each step, are simple. Baseboards are found throughout the house. All doorways have trim. The rear addition, now demolished, contained a summer kitchen and a Dutch oven.

Prepared by: Susan McCown
Historian
Historic American Buildings Survey
Washington, D.C.
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PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, 1979.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentary project was the result of a Memorandum of Agreement between the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in compliance with Executive Order 11593 as a mitigative effort in an urban renewed plan for Claremont. Susan McCown of the staff of Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) prepared the written report of the house in the Spring of 1982. Lewis G. Smith was the photographer for the 1975 documentary photographs. John A. Burns, AIA, was the HABS co-ordinator for the project.